

Samuel Desmarest House
New Milford, Bergen County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-16

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

RECEIVED
FEB 1965

SAMUEL DESMAREST HOUSE
Near French Cemetery
River Road
New Milford, Bergen County
New Jersey

Owner: Mr. Henry Riemann.

Date of Erection: ^{c. 1677-79} ~~1677-79~~ (see following page and card);
~~about 1679 (see chimney).~~

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition:

Number of Stories: One and a half , and cellar.

Materials of Construction: Stone.

Other Existing Records: See text. ¹

Additional Data: See following pages.

¹ See Ellis, R.C., Colonial Dutch Houses in New Jersey, p. 42.

Source of information - letter from Mr. Clarence H. Tabor, Jr. in charge of the Ridgewood office of the New Jersey H.A.B.S. to Mr. Seymour Williams, District Officer - dated January 31, 1934.

"The house is not occupied at present but is used by the Pochade Club for week-ends during the summer.

This house was built in 1677 or 1678 by David desMarast for his wife and four children* on land which was obtained under the French Patent from the Indians. The building seems unspoiled by modern additions or alterations. It is a charming, simple gabled house of two large rooms with two front doors and represents the first wing of what might have been a large house if it had had the usual larger gambrelled house added. However, no addition was made, apparently because des Marie's wife died shortly after it was occupied.

He then built the Demarest House at New Milford, about a mile and a half up the Hackensack River, for his son David, Jr. in 1681. This is the Gurd House (which we are now doing). Later he built another house across the river for his son Jean.

Interesting man was David, Sr. He married Marie Schier in 1643. Embarked in 1663 on the "Spotted Cow" for New Amsterdam. Settled at Harlem. Would not support the Dutch Church (he was a French Huguenot) and moved to Jersey and settled in 1677 where his house still stands way back from the road along the river. Adjoining is an old French cemetery with stones as old as 1665, so I am told."

*Field note-book says David des Marest, the original pioneer, built for his son Samuel about 1679.

Reviewed 1936, H. C. F.

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SAMUEL DES MAREST HOUSE
New Milford, New Jersey

From a Report by Frank Chouteau Brown, February 1940.

... I found a marker carrying the following legend:

"Site of the French Church and Cemetery of
Kinkachemeck, New Jersey, deeded to David
Des Marest June 8, 1677 by Tapan Indians."

At this point a rough road led off down toward the river, and following this road, and passing by the old cemetery, I found the Samuel Des Marest House of which I believe the claimed date is 1679. This was evidently the house ..., as recently a new roof had been added with a thick but rather smooth shingle. There was no one on the site and no workmen carrying on any work the day I was there. I should not consider the work done had been at all overseen and probably had merely been let to some local builder, as on the north elevation and along the end rakes, a very common modern stock molding had been placed, which had no relation, probably, to any original section. The south side of the house had two dormers that from their proportion appeared to be old, but the new shingling had obscured any remains of old finish and new narrow pairs of stock casements had taken the place, perhaps, of whatever might have been there originally. They obviously had no relation to any original treatment, either in proportion or detail section.

On the north, or rear side, the stone work returns on the east end about two feet (which might be the thickness of the wall) and at the west end about 4½ feet. At both these places there seemed to be a finished perpendicular end to these wall cheeks. The space between these stone ends was filled in with possibly later wood work, and suggested the possibility that at some time there might have been a lean-to shed along this side of the structure.

The front, or south side, had an overhang and apparently the new roof followed the old lines, although new rafter ends or brackets had been recently added to carry out the roof curve, and strips carrying back to the face of the wall were in position but no soffit or soffit molding had been put up. The exposure of the under side of the shingling showed they had been placed on shingle strips, approximately four inches wide and two or three inches apart.

Despite its small size (the whole house was hardly over 28 or 30 feet long, and was probably less) this front re-echoed some of the smaller type of houses I had seen previously in Rockland County, just to the north. The first story was built of coursed

brown stone up to the line of the roof. There appeared to be only two rooms on the first floor and the only fireplace, apparently, was at the west end, beside which was an old door hung with the batten side out and probably taken from another position, to swing out.

The front contained two entrance doors about four or five feet apart and of considerably later treatment, with Greek moldings, probably of 1850 to 1860 and at present new reveals placed two to three inches inside the old stone on which the original jamb was probably placed. Both openings had been narrowed about six inches from their original size. On the outer side of each doorway was a double-hung window still showing the old, heavy, solid frames and sills. Two panel shutters were also in place, or lying on the ground below the openings.

All the present window sash are double-hung with glass of about 7 x 9 size and a very narrow muntin, the outer wooden rib being less than a quarter of an inch wide--and, while very roughly set, the inside wooden muntin can hardly exceed $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide. The sash are, however, quite thin and must be old; although they are not of a type that would seem to be original in the regions I am familiar with--unless in New Jersey they do not have the $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide muntin on first double-hung sash.

The present windows in the attic gable ends are stock, poor light sash of late 19th century, I should say.

The front window sash and frames had apparently been painted a yellowish color with a mixture of clay and milk, and where later pointing had fallen out the clay in which the original stone work was laid could be seen.

Near the east and west ends of the front were bulkhead entrances admitting to the cellar, and one of these had no covering, so that I was able to get under the house where the old construction of heavy hewn timbers, usually found in early houses in this vicinity, could be seen.

There was an arch under the fireplace at the west end, and apparently the only access from the first floor was through a trap door. The cellar was filled with old rubbish, cartwheels, an old pump, painters' brushes, etc., and the floor was merely a clay surface, which was very soft and it gave the effect of this space not having been in use for a number of years.

The west bulkhead retained some of its old hardware and I judge there might be a considerable amount of old strap hinge and latch hardware found about the place.

The east end stone work is badly in need of repair, having been thrown out between the two windows between 4 and 6 inches near the upper part of the wall, and the end window toward the front showed evidence of several repairs to the lintel, including an iron bar. The window nearer the northerly side on this end was evidently older and smaller in size than the window near the front. There were no windows or openings in the present north wooden wall; which showed evidence of upright boarding over which later shingles had been placed, the latter now largely had fallen off.

Across the front of the building a rough platform of brown stone existed, flush with the surface of the ground, apparently extending back to the house, although the space between the bulkheads was filled with two later wooden steps across that portion of the front. The wooden gable ends, above the stone work, have been faced with modern stock siding; although by the weathering given to parts of it, it would seem to have been in place for 30 or 40 years.

If any proper restoration of the building is under consideration, these stock boards should be removed and replaced with material simulating the original facing,--which I presume then would have been hand split or rived clapboards, which should be used on the end attic gables and end overhand, while the present rake finish should also be probably restored to an original local type.

From general conditions around the house I should judge it had been, since its recent purchase, merely roofed in order to be made tight by the new owners, and I also judge that nothing had been done inside the house in the first story to clean it up or repair it in any way. ... It was in a general state of disorder (with additional shingle bundles in one of the rooms) so I judge that it is intended to make further repairs.

On the west end, at a distance of about two inches back from the front wall, on both sides of the door and extending about 7 or 8 feet towards the north, to a height of about 5½ feet above the ground, an area of this wall has been covered by many coats of lime wash to a thickness of about one-quarter inch; that would seem to indicate that at some time or other a low wing or ell had existed at this end.

The house is now largely enclosed and surrounded by thickets of native shrubs, and evidently little care has been given to the grounds for some time. The Hackensack River, apparently, flows not far from the house on the west and northwest sides; but is not visible through shrubbery at present. The drive in from the River Road is a very rough dirt drive and apparently ends in front of this dwelling.

... I should judge that it is possible the house has been secured to be maintained by some interested members of the family, and the work thus far done was merely to make the structure tight

until they could perhaps secure more funds for rebuilding parts of the stone work that badly need attention. From what had thus far been done, however, I should say the family badly needed to secure proper advice, and also proper archeological supervision of the work, if it is to have any value as an historical documentation of the very early houses in that region. The house is locally regarded as the "oldest house" in that township.

(Signed) Frank C. Brown
Architect in Charge
Northeastern Region.

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Addendum to:
Samuel Des Marest House
East Main Street
New Milford
Bergen County
New Jersey

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